

Call For Papers  
International Conference at the University of Freiburg  
29.11.–1.12.2023

## **The Funerary Archaeology of Byzantine Constantinople New Approaches, New Methodologies, and New Discoveries**

Mortuary practices are cultural phenomena common to humanity, and therefore burials and the “archaeology of death” have long been recognized as essential sources for all archaeologies. This is also true of Byzantine archaeology, and in recent decades graves and tombs, cemeteries and burial churches have increasingly been the focus of historical, art historical, and scientific research. By reason of its importance and size, the Byzantine capital of Constantinople occupies a central place in the historical development of Byzantine burial practices, and its funerary archaeology can be recognized as an essential source for understanding society, religion, demography, and urbanism in the imperial city. However, despite this importance, in contrast to the funerary archaeology of Old Rome, that of Constantinople is relatively poorly documented and often badly preserved, with data scattered in disparate publications, and lack a theoretical base and detailed synthesis. Fundamental information is still lacking, and even what is known has never been systematically compiled and evaluated. This desideratum has been known for a long time, and as Alfons Maria Schneider once remarked, one may still ask, “Where were the cemeteries of Byzantine Constantinople?”

Our conference seeks to address these issues by focusing on new approaches, new methodologies, and new discoveries. We aim to synthesize and devise a new understanding of the funerary archaeology of Constantinople and its suburbs, moving beyond just the primary documentation of empirical data to consider challenges of its recovery and interpretation, and to build up a new diachronic understanding of the development of burial practices in the capital region from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. By using the term ‘funerary archaeology’ we wish to encourage the development of an inclusive, holistic, and multidimensional approach to this subject, one that brings together historical texts, archaeology, and scientific data in interpretive dialogue, and which is sensitive to theorizing in other funerary archaeologies. Our aim is to take a broader view than solely the prestigious and well-published monuments (imperial tombs, aristocratic burial churches), although they should be included in such a conference. Rather than just reprising what is well-known and well-published about such monuments, we aim to put these elite burial practices into proper relation with the rest of the funerary archaeology and written sources that document the other mortuary populations of Constantinople.

Without neglecting the obvious religious, artistic, and historical dimensions of the funerary archaeology of Constantinople, particular foci, in terms of papers and the desired outcomes of the conference, will be:

- To gain better understanding of the funerary archaeology itself, the historical development of grave and tomb types, and burial styles, by synthesizing old and new material.
- To explore the construction of individual and collective identities in death through burial by examining the mortuary practices of different social categories and groups, populations and ethnicities.
- To analyze the funerary archaeology of Constantinople through the intersection of social status, religious belief, gender, culture, and ideology.
- To develop a better understanding of the organization, administration, and spatial distribution of burials and cemeteries, and of the chronological development of the same inside and outside the city, and thus to gain a better understanding of burial as an institution at Constantinople.
- By doing so, to enhance our understanding of the roles of burial places and the topography of death in the urban history and development of Constantinople from its foundation by Constantine I through the Ottoman conquest.
- More broadly, to contribute to our understanding of the evolution and interpretation of Byzantine burial practices, and to the development of its archaeological methodology and theory.
- To promote and stimulate a greater awareness of the importance and potential of Byzantine funerary archaeology in archaeologists, historians, and Byzantine scholarship in general.

While recognizing the unique nature of Constantinople as the imperial capital, and gaps in our archaeological knowledge, we also aim to contextualize the funerary archaeology of Constantinople by reference to its immediate hinterland in Europe, Asia, and the Propontis, which one can consider as being within the immediate cultural, religious, economic, and political orbit of the capital, and by reference to that of the Byzantine provinces, which one can consider as being in dialogue with the imperial capital through shared imperial frameworks.

We wish to understand the role of Constantinople as a consumer, creator, trendsetter, and disseminator of burial styles, seeking to explore these processes through various mechanisms such as:

- The formation and institutionalization of Christian and other forms of burial at the new capital of Constantinople between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The role of local workshop practices and traditions in the forms taken by tombs and graves.

- The roles of the Church and funeral liturgies in the development of burial styles, tomb types, and burial locations.
- The impact of empire-wide trends, such as the development of saints' tomb-shrines and burial in and around churches *ad sanctos* in Late Antiquity.
- The role of imperial and canon law in the development of burial styles, tomb types, and the locations of burial places.
- The roles of political and social networks of the imperial elites of State and Church in the development of tomb types, burial styles, and burial locations at Constantinople.
- The impact of the relative economic growth and decline of Constantinople, and its population, on burial patterns over time.
- The roles of cultural changes and social developments over time in the evolution of tomb types, burial styles, and burial places and locations.

As regards the long-term outcomes of this conference, we wish to edit a volume of conference proceedings for publication, which we hope will have a transformative impact on the field of Byzantine funerary archaeology, with importance for other comparative archaeologies, and the fields of Byzantine art history, and Byzantine studies in general.

The conference is hosted by the department of Byzantine Archaeology at Freiburg University together with the City University of New York and in cooperation with the Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED) and the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul (DAI). It will take place November 29<sup>st</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 as a hybrid event (zoom and in person) at Freiburg University. The language of the conference will be English.

Interested scholars are invited to submit proposals (500 words max) by April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 to [fabian.stroth@archaeologie.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:fabian.stroth@archaeologie.uni-freiburg.de).

Organizing Committee:  
 Jesko Fildhuth (Freiburg)  
 Eric Ivison (New York)  
 Fabian Stroth (Freiburg)

universität freiburg



DEUTSCHES  
 ARCHÄOLOGISCHES INSTITUT  
 ISTANBUL

